

Monkfish Cooperative Survey 2004  
Steering Committee Meeting  
Oct. 28, 2003, 9:30 -12:30  
Lillie Laboratory (MBL) Room 100A

**Attending:**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>
Alexander, Lendall Jr.	Commercial Fishing
Brown, Russell	NEFSC
Haring, Philip	NEFMC
Hoey, John	NEFSC
Maguire, J.J.	Halieutikos Inc.
Marks, Rick	Monkfish Defense Fund
Milliken, Henry	NEFSC
Pickett, Chris	NEFSC
Richards, Anne	NEFSC
Ruhle, Phil	F/V Sea Breeze
Stolpe, Nils	Monkfish Defense Fund
Terceiro, Mark	NEFSC

**Agenda items:**

I. Review of the 2001 coop monkfish survey

II. 2004 coop monkfish survey:

a) funding – Rick Marks indicated that the House version of the NMFS budget included \$1,000,000 for the survey, but that the Senate has not approved this. The earliest we might know the outcome is mid-November. John Hoey reported that NMFS is committed to conducting the survey whether the line item is approved or not.

b) survey objectives – include most of those from the previous study (abundance, distribution, size, age, sex composition, age and growth, maturation, food habits, abundance of blackfin monkfish). Distribution of monkfish in deeper waters may have been addressed by a cooperative gillnet survey conducted during spring of 2003 (results not yet available). If not, we may consider a separate (small) survey to address deep water distribution (similar to transect attempted as part of 2001 coop monkfish survey). Other monkfish researchers should be contacted to see if any of their research needs can be addressed in the context of this survey (e.g. Chris Chambers, Jon Grabowski).

c) survey design – will be similar to the 2001 coop monkfish survey, which used a stratified random design with the addition of specific station locations selected by industry members. We agreed on the following: (1) we will use the same stations as last time, (2) we will plan to complete all 284 stations again, but may

reduce the number of stations if there are budget trade-offs (e.g. buying mensuration gear so each tow can be monitored vs. doing all 284 stations), (3) we will reduce the extent of age sampling for monkfish (new targets for age sampling will be developed from variance in length at age from 2001 coop survey), (4) time frame for the survey will be between mid-January 2004 and end of March 2004, (5) we will use two trawlers (1 in northern management region, 1 in southern) using their own nets.

d) gear studies – (1) each net will be mounted with mensuration equipment for every survey tow in addition to the suite of other sensors used in 2001 (inclinometers, temperature sensors). (2) the gear work will focus on depletion experiments (for estimating net efficiency) as these are critical to narrowing the range of abundance and mortality estimates. Experiments will be conducted in different habitat types (North: hard bottom (gravel) and mud; South: sand and mud) and at a range of depths. Experiments will be replicated in each of these conditions. Tide/current (speed through water) is important but is difficult to control for in an experimental mode, and will fall out as a random effect in the survey estimates. Tow track should be repeated in the same direction each time as was done previously (not back and forth). (3) RFP should include minimum specifications for plotters to assure tow paths can be repeated accurately (4) inter-vessel and inter-net comparisons will not be repeated as these are not needed for estimation of absolute abundance. (5) video work will not be repeated as the 2001 videos were sufficiently conclusive re. possible herding and escapement (both minimal).

e) data handling – (1) it may be possible to use automated data collection on this survey, given recent testing of portable systems by the Northwest Fisheries Science Center. Chris Pickett (NMFS) and others are working on this. Alternative would be paper logs and manual recording of data, as in 2001 survey. (2) RFP should specify that vessel owners be willing to sign a waiver for release of data (re. confidentiality issues). (3) Survey results (data) should be made available to the public on the monkfish survey website.

f) permits: Retention of catch (legal portion only, monkfish and other species) is likely to be approved as long as it is specified in the research plan. Sale of catch will be used to offset survey costs, not to increase vessel profit.

g) staffing – will be difficult because NMFS is conducting two surveys at the same time the coop monkfish survey is expected to go out. Each vessel will need to carry a minimum of 5 scientists, at least 3 of whom must be experienced with NMFS data collection procedures. Observers probably will not be available to fill the gaps this time. Possible sources of scientists include state agencies, Rutgers, SMAST, the regional office, council staff (in addition to NMFS staff). Researchers requesting samples from the survey must provide staffing on board the ships.

h) contracting – suggestions for advertising the RFP were discussed, including Commercial Fisheries News (an article on the survey?), the Councils' PR groups, and posting on various web sites watched by commercial trawlers.

i) data analysis, stock assessment – timing and extent of the stock assessment following the survey was discussed with time frames ranging from June 2004 (SAW 39) to August or SAW 40 in December 2004. The Council would like to have the assessment by September 2004.

j) outreach – the website was a good tool last time, and will be continued.

k) other research – suggestions for additional research to be done in conjunction with the survey included (1) habitat sampling. This could be done in a variety of ways, ranging from simple routine observation of sediment on nets or doors, mounting a scoop on the net or doors, to acoustic methods. USGS has been doing fine scale habitat mapping which may be a source of existing data. Another research suggestion was (2) to do deep water transects (depending on gill net study results from spring 2003). A suggestion was made (3) to do some gill net selectivity work in conjunction with the depletion experiments. The results of the depletion experiments could be used to establish baseline abundance and size composition in an area to compare with gillnet catches subsequently obtained in that area (e.g. the next day). (4) Side-by-side comparisons with the Albatross were not considered a high priority.

l) more research (if funding significantly exceeds needs for survey) – possibilities include a separate tagging study (for stock delineation, movements, mortality) and otolith microconstituent analysis (for stock delineation, ontogenetic movements, samples to collected on 2004 coop monkfish survey). Research recommendations from SARC 34 include work to define stock structure (various methods); gear experiments to estimate relative selectivity of trawls and gill nets; development of gear to reduce discards of undersize monkfish; tagging studies; and use of study fleets as an additional means of estimating abundance.

m) next steps: It was agreed that meetings should be held in New Bedford and Portland to discuss plans for the survey with industry members to get broader feedback from the industry and to raise interest in responding to the RFPs. The RFPs should be fairly well developed before the meeting, and early December was discussed as a possible time frame. Monkfish Defense Fund will organize the meetings.